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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000022

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA AND DRL A/S LOWENKRON

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONERS DESCRIBE ANGUISH IN CAMAGUEY

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a letter smuggled out of Cuba's infamous Kilo 7 prison in Camaguey, 16 political prisoners have denounced "barbaric" conditions, including violent and humiliating repression, a shortage of food, medical neglect and a visitation system "designed to destroy family ties." The letter, dated January 1, calls on foreign governments and the Human Rights Council to intercede with the Cuban Government to address the situation. At prisons in Holguin and Santiago, other political prisoners are suffering, family members told us on January 7. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) will release a report on January 9 that puts the number of documented political prisoners at 283. Although this represents a decline, the GOC in 2006 stepped up its intimidation of human rights activists through warnings, citations and interrogations. The Cuban Foreign Ministry has published a series of books on Cuba's human rights record; the chapter on prisons calls the GOC's prison system "profoundly humane" and subject to distortion by the United States. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Sixteen political prisoners, including independent journalist Normando Hernandez and Alfredo Pulido of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), have released a letter condemning wretched conditions at Camaguey's Kilo 7 prison. The two-page letter, addressed to the UN Human Rights Council and diplomatic offices in Havana, harshly criticizes the penitentiary for its repressive staff, shortage of food, overcrowding, poor hygiene, and lack basic materials such as towels and sheets. The prisoners said that what little food is available is poorly prepared, and that the prison staff uses hunger as a political tool. "If you attend ideological classes, you get to eat lunch," the letter explains. But not all inmates go hungry; double rations are available to common prisoners who do the guards' bidding, including ganging up on and even stabbing prisoners who fail to toe the line.

DAILY BEATINGS

¶3. (SBU) Kilo 7's guards do not outsource all of the violence, however. According to the letter, prisoners are beaten every day, and guards impose discipline through violence and physical and verbal mistreatment. "Blood and punches are the symbol of (warden) Didier Fundora Perez." The signers of the letter also condemned the practice of forcing prisoners to march naked past guards, and occasionally being required to squat and/or spread their

buttocks. The letter adds that the intensity of the repression contributes to the high number of suicide attempts and acts of self-mutilation at the prison.

JAILHOUSE DENTISTRY

14. (C) Prisoners alleged serious deficiencies in medical care at Kilo 7, regarded as Cuba's worst prison by prison expert and former political prisoner Elizardo Sanchez. Inmates at the Camaguey prison wait years for operations, and those suffering from intense tooth pain perform their own extractions using wire. The visitation system, the letter says, is "designed to destroy family ties," and subjects even senior citizens and children to mistreatment. Correspondence is read and censored. Telephone access is limited and in some cases banned outright.

SILENCE FROM HOLGUIN PRISON

15. (C) At Holguin Provincial Prison, political prisoner Alfredo Dominguez of the MCL has been incommunicado for more than a month, his wife told us on January 7. She said that at her last prison visit, on December 5, Dominguez informed her that he and three other political prisoners would stage a hunger strike on December 9, 10 and 11, to mark International Human Rights Day. His wife believes that Dominguez lost his phone privileges as a result of the hunger strike. She said she had been told by relatives of other prisoners at Holguin that when her home telephone number is dialed from the prison, the caller is told the line is out of service or the number is unassigned.

AT SANTIAGO PRISON, HEALTH WOES

16. (C) At the Santiago prison of Aguadores, Dr. Ricardo Silva

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of the MCL enjoys phone privileges. But as his mother told us on January 7, Dr. Silva is dealing with myriad health woes, including giardia and optical nerve damage. On the bright side, the mother said, the GOC recently informed the family that Aguadores' visitation system would soon be changed; instead of every 45 days, the family would be permitted a monthly visit. (Note: Many political prisoners are granted visits on a less frequent basis. Grass-roots activist Angel Moya Acosta, for instance, is allowed only quarterly visits. In some cases, the family visits are banned entirely; such was the case for most of the incarceration of Hector Palacios, who was released on conditional probation on December 6. End Note.)

GOC DENIES PROBLEMS, ACCUSES U.S.

17. (U) In late December, the GOC delivered to each accredited diplomatic mission in Havana a series of books produced by the Cuban Foreign Ministry and titled, "Cuba and Human Rights: The Upsurge in the Policy of Hostility and Aggression against the Cuban People by the Administration of George W. Bush." In the chapter on prisons (septel), the GOC claims to have established a "profoundly humane" prison system, characterized by respect for the law. The book accuses the United States of "inventing images of horrible conditions" and a sub-human diet at prisons, and of denouncing "false shortages."

COMMENT

18. (C) In the absence of access to Cuban prisons by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross, letters smuggled out of prisons are enlightening, if disturbing. The report on Kilo 7 tracks

with what we have heard about conditions at other Cuban prisons. Elizardo Sanchez's CCDHRN will release a report on January 9 stating that the number of political prisoners documented by the CCDHRN at the end of 2006 stood at 283. Although this marks a reduction from the year-earlier figure of 333, the GOC stepped up its intimidation of dissidents in 2006 through increased reliance on official warnings, citations and interrogations.

¶9. (C) The Kilo 7 account is among the most authoritative and compelling reports we have received in recent months from inside a Cuban prison. It highlights a problem long known to Cuba watchers, and which we describe at length in the forthcoming Human Rights Report. Post recommends that at Washington's rollout of the HRR, this issue be highlighted.

¶10. (C) Post also recommends that Washington agencies add to their databases and watchlists the name of Didier Fundora Perez, warden at Kilo 7.
PARMLY